

97-191 ERPP

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Manteca, CA 95337  
August 5, 1997

Lester Snow and BDAC Members  
CALFED Bay Delta Program  
1416 9th St., Suite 1155  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Lester and BDAC Members:

We have now received the first two one inch thick volumes of the Ecosystem Restoration Program Plan. They represent a great deal of thought and study. They portray lovely visions of reversions toward natural conditions, and of conceptual actions to move toward those visions. I believe, however, that they lack reality by largely ignoring the competition for land and water imposed by relentless growth in human population. Our overall plan will be illusory and hence not durable if it is based on cumulative reallocations of land and water that can not be achieved or sustained in competition with this present and growing human population. The basic "stressor" is not greedy developers or inefficient water users. It is insufficient water to provide the food, the amenities, the ducks, and the fish that people have come to expect. Conservation and recycling alone will not fill the gap.

The Bay Area imports five times as much Tuolumne water as it did fifty years ago. Yet it expects to need further increases in imports from the Tuolumne, Mokelumne, and American Rivers, despite efforts to conserve and recycle water. Southern California arguably leads the State in efficient water management, yet they expect to take substantially more water from the Central Valley. Every new development in the valley decreases stream flow, and/or increases unsustainable groundwater overdraft, and/or displaces crop production. New refuges are irrigated with water otherwise used for production of food and fiber crops.

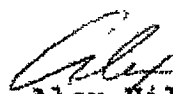
Our plans can't assume a stop in population growth. And we are not proposing to restore substantial portions of historical Bay Area habitat, or stop the growth of valley cities. The illusory solution proposed is to displace agricultural land, and buy, or otherwise take water now used to provide food and fiber for this growing population. We have not added the water acquisitions proposed by CalFed, CVPIA, DWR, numerous urban districts, FERC flows, and other stream augmentation proposals. Are they cumulatively physically possible? What would be the financial and social costs if they are? Let us not rely on blind faith that we can buy whatever water it takes to fulfill an ecological dream, or that sales of water by willing sellers are

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always in the best interest of society; unlike sales of beaches, parks, refuges, etc. Will we like the changes in land use that will result from taking water away from dedicated farm land? Let us not be intoxicated with a lovely dream like the legendary Camelot where it was full moon every night.

We can clearly do better by the environment at any given level of human population, but we should not enthuse over beautiful visions that have not yet received a reality check. I believe it is past time to quantify feasibility and look at impacts. This should be an iterative process. We can't make real progress by adopting visions first, and assuming that they will survive later scrutiny. I, too, look back with longing for the natural ecology I enjoyed as a boy, but the population then was a small fraction of what it is today.

Sincerely,



Alex Hildebrand